THE DEITY OF CHRIST

BY

CHARLES GORE, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D.

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Four Sermons preached during Advent, 1921, in Grosvenor Chapel

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CHARLES GORE, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D.

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PREFACE

THESE sermons were not designed for publication, and the subject of them demands more continuous and elaborate treatment than can be given it in four unwritten addresses. But they were found useful to some at least who heard them; and they were taken down by a skilful reporter. Thus, as on a former occasion, I have agreed to their publication in the hope that they may serve to confirm faith in our Lord. If any one feels that the argument is abrupt and inadequate, I do not doubt that he feels rightly, and I will say that I am hoping, before this year is out, to publish a volume on The Person of Christ in which the subject will be, I trust, more adequately treated.

C. G.

The Feast of S. Paul, 1922.

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THE DEITY OF CHRIST

SERMON I

The Great Question

"Jesus saith unto them, Who say ye that I am?"
S. Matt. xvi. 15.

THAT question was not an easy one to answer, nor was it at that time finally answered by that little group of men around Jesus. But finally, after all their experiences of Him and after the coming of the enlightening Spirit, we know the answer which the leaders of those disciples gave, and which the whole church since their day has given. It is—"Thou art indeed very man, the son of man, but thou art more than man; thou art God in manhood; very God, the Son of the Father, who for us men and for our salvation hast been incarnate and hast borne for us all the experiences of manhood to lift us into the fellowship of God." And so it is, when to-day people dispute—anxiously, contentiously, scornfully, doubtfully—about the answer to that question, this is what really is in their minds—

Is this the right answer? Is Jesus Christ really the Son of God, very God? Well, that is what we are here to consider.

But, first of all, I would have you feel what an astonishing thing it is that here to-day men should be asking the question at all. It is only about this Jesus that men would dream of asking the question. About no other one of the sons of men should we dream of asking it. There have been great founders of religion who have moved, and still move, by their influence great masses of men; like Zoroaster, or that Siddartha Gautama, whom men call Buddha, the enlightened one; or that Mohammed whose influence men feel, and we feel, so profoundly in the world to-day. And there have been great philosophers, great poets, great leaders, men whom we regard, all of them, as extraordinary. Geniuses we call them—and we mean by "a genius" to express one who seems to possess some incommunicable and unique gift. But if we are asked of what sort any one of these was, there is no question at all about the answer. We believe them to have been men with special gifts and special powers, but we do not dream of thinking about them as anything else. About none of them is the question of deity

raised by us to-day; it is raised only about One.

Of course that was not so in the early days. In earlier days, in days of polytheism, when men believed in gods many, in the days when Christianity came into the world—outside the influence of the great Hebrew prophets—men could very lightly and easily say that so and so was a god. The founder of Rome, Romulus, the re-founders of Rome, Julius and Augustus, were said without any hesitation to be gods. And those who followed this or that school of philosophy called their founder, their Epicurus for instance, a god. And as they looked up into the heavens, and saw those mysterious heavenly bodies, in which they seemed to see tremendous powers controlling human life, they said, "No doubt the stars are gods." It was not only the vulgar who said this; it was the educated who said it also. God was for them a diffused kind of atmosphere; even any good man might be said to be a god. So much so that one great philosopher, who believed profoundly in the Supreme Being or One, could hardly bear to call Him God; he wanted something above that; the name of God was too vulgar, too common, for the Supreme One.

Thus there was a world in which it would have been an easy thing to call Jesus a God. But into this world there had come a voice which had never before been heard among men—the voice of the Hebrew prophets: and they had taught Israel, and those who caught their message, that God was one only, almighty, the righteous Creator of all that is in heaven or earth, and the just Judge of all rational spirits; and this new faith in God had put new power into men. To believe thus in the one Eternal Creator and Judge had given men a new life; and had made the Jews, although they were a small race, a power which all the world acknowledged and dreaded. And for the Jew, or for all who had accepted the Jewish religion, there was no more any easy-going way of calling a man god; there could be no deifying of a man. There could be no passing from being a creature to being the Creator; that was impossible. Men looked around and they saw all sorts and grades of being as between higher and lower creatures; but all those grades and distinctions of being, as between higher and lower creatures, were as nothing to the tremendous and awful difference between the creature and the Creator. To talk of a creature becoming

Creator—that was impossible. And to think of the Creator becoming a creature—that had never occurred to them as possible.

It is this Jewish faith that lies at the basis of our civilization, and still holds its ground. So that we rightly feel it is a tremendous thing to speak of the Deity, of the Godhead, of one who was undoubtedly the man Jesus. It is no easy answer, that answer which the church has given to the question, "Who do ye say that I am?" On the contrary, it seems obvious to say that He was a very good man and no more; a very great man and no more; a supreme religious genius and no more. And yet we are not satisfied; we cannot keep off the old question. You remember that story of Charles Lamb amongst his friends—how, when one had spoken lightly of Jesus, he (though I do not know that he had any settled dogmatic creed) said, "Don't do that, there is such a difference. If Shakespeare came into the room we should all get up; but if Jesus came into the room we should all fall down on our knees." People have always felt that; you cannot get rid of the mystery of His person.

Of course there have been plenty of humanitarian lives of Jesus written by very able men;

some of them with incomparable gifts of style. There is no more fascinating book than Renan's *Life of Jesus.* But one peculiarity of these humanitarian lives of Jesus is that they are so strangely different. In fact no man can re-write on a merely humanitarian basis that which is recorded in the Gospels. And if you eliminate all that is supernatural or miraculous or superhuman out of the story, what remains becomes so uncertain, so malleable, that you can make almost what you like out of it according to your imagination. So you find two things about the humanitarian lives of Jesus. First that, as I say, they are astonishingly different and contradictory. In Renan's *Life of Jesus* you are presented with the delightful and fascinating figure of a peasant, an idealist, with his intuition of the Father who is in heaven and His love for all men; and as you read the story, there is nothing that is not at first fascinating and attractive to the modern mind, if at the same time it becomes rather insipid, and at points rather disgusting. But the recent critics disclaim it. It has failed to keep its place.

Then you read some more modern life, written under some more modern critical impulse, and there you are presented with a

totally different being,—the fiery enthusiast, the apocalyptic Christ: a strange, almost wild fanatic, deluded into the belief that He was coming in a few weeks in the clouds of heaven to be the judge of the world. The two pictures are strangely different; you would hardly take Renan's picture or Harnack's picture on the one hand, and Schweitzer's picture on the other, to be pictures of the same man. They are quite different. Also I think you will find them by the side of the Gospels profoundly unsatisfying. If I try the experiment of reading one or another of these humanitarian Lives of Jesus and become fascinated and interested, and then put it down and take Luke or Mark and read that story, I say to myself as I think of the clever critic's book—No, sir, it won't do; there is something there in this old story that it is not in you either to see or to reproduce. There is a real belief in a God who is revealing Himself in Jesus in judgement and mercy.

But then of course you say, "Can I trust these Gospels?" In part I think the answer lies within the scope of our perceptions without any inquiry into their origin. I confess that as I read these old books, so naive and so small in compass, I receive an impression which is almost irresistible, that this picture is coherent

and such as would have passed the wit of man to invent. You would have to take account of this—that the literary generation to which our Lord belonged in time, the kind of men amongst whom He was in Judea and Galilee, and their contemporaries in the great Greek world, though they had many gifts, yet were in what you would call the constructive imagination notably deficient. You cannot imagine any great fiction arising out of that period.

But you may also look out more broadly over the world and still ask—Can I read these stories and think that this is the work of human invention? We have had powerful writers, men of constructive imagination, our Cervantes, our Shakespeare, our great novelists; and do you not note one thing about them? They can picture bad men, eccentric men, comic men, tragic men. They can picture all sorts and kinds of characters. They can picture exceedingly good, holy, pure women; but there has been hardly any successful male saint in fiction. The Sir Charles Grandisons are apt to be as insipid or priggish as the saints of imaginative hagiology. What then is this supernaturally-conceived being, so human yet so divine—this Jesus of

the Gospels — so tender and so tremendous, so loving and so stern, so miraculous and so natural? I say to myself as I read that story, told in the simplest language without any pretension, "I am touching reality! This passes the wit of man to invent or to imagine!"

And then make a little inquiry, and you will find that these documents have been subjected to the most searching criticism to which any documents on earth have ever been subjected. Every possible doubt has exercised itself upon them; but I am not exaggerating when I say that they have been given back to us with the best guarantees. There is no reasonable doubt that the second Gospel was written by John Mark; and we know who this John Mark was. He was brought up in his mother's house at Jerusalem. We find him there about fourteen years after the Crucifixion. His mother's house was a large house, so that the company of Christians could assemble there—a large number of people—for prayer when Peter was in prison.[1] It must also have been a large house because it had an outer gateway into a court-yard, and a porteress whose name we know, Rhoda; and it was plainly the place of common gathering of the followers of Jesus.

[1] Acts xii. 12.

There Mark had been brought up. I do not think it is possible to doubt, myself, that in his Gospel,[1] when he suddenly introduces the incident of the young man in the linen garment —which has no connection with anything that goes before and after—he means by this to say, "I was that young man, I saw Jesus taken." It is just as in an Italian picture of the fifteenth century, when you see one quite incongruous figure introduced into the sacred subject, you say—Either this was the donor or it was the painter. So when you see these few phrases, quite unconnected with what goes before and after, about the young man in the linen garment who was there when they took Jesus, you say—That was young Mark; there is no other reason why he should have put it in. If so he was probably amongst those first disciples from the beginning. He had the opportunity of constantly seeing and hearing that group all the time they remained in Jerusalem, both men and women.

Well, he was Barnabas' cousin; and (after some fourteen or fifteen years) Barnabas fetched him to help Paul and himself at Antioch, and he was with them there, and went with them thence on their first mission-

[1] S. Mark xiv. 51.

ary journey, and suddenly left them—probably because he was conservative with the conservatism of the disciples at Jerusalem, and dreaded S. Paul's progressive catholicism in opening the door so freely to the Gentile world. Anyway, he left them and came back to Antioch; and there was a breach between him and Paul, and between Paul and Barnabas, Mark's cousin, who took his part, arising out of this. So Barnabas took him, and he started on another missionary journey with Barnabas; and then for ten years we hear nothing more about him.

After that we find that he has been reconciled to Paul, and is there with Paul in his prison at Rome, and Paul loves him and trusts him, for he thinks there is nobody like him for an assistant. Thus he writes about him again from his second captivity; and after S. Paul has been martyred, Peter in the same way writes about him and calls him "My son"; and there is a quite trustworthy tradition of the early second century which tells us that he was S. Peter's companion and interpreter, and that the "Gospel" which he wrote was the record, as accurate as he could make it, of what he had heard S. Peter teaching about the words and deeds of Jesus.

So we should fill up those vacant ten years of his life by supposing that he went about with Peter, and that it was Peter's habit to tell a certain selection of incidents from his experiences with Jesus. Now the Jewish disciples of rabbis had a marvellous capacity for treasuring the words of their teachers. So, with a like faithfulness, we think of S. Mark retaining and recording the narratives of Peter. He took them down perhaps at once in writing; but whether in writing or in his memory he retained them; and this is the main bulk of his little Gospel. Certainly then this Mark had singular opportunities for learning the truth about Jesus. Then when I read his short Gospel, the impression is to me irresistible. One feels it no doubt more if one reads the original Greek, but I think one feels it sufficiently in the English. You cannot resist the impression that this is an eye-witness's story. There are the gestures, the looks of Jesus. You are living in the group which is round Him, with their murmurings, with their questionings; you are in the presence of the reality; you feel it. And certainly no one can fail to recognize that this John Mark, whose experiences we more or less accurately know, was a personality pro-

foundly qualified to give a true account of what the apostolic experiences had been, and what they taught about their Master.

Then in the third Gospel, S. Luke's, you have the work of a much more highly-educated man. Luke was "the beloved Physician," S. Paul's companion. Doubtless he had been trained as a physician, and he uses the language of a physician and a well-educated Greek. You read the preface to his Gospel, and it gives you a simple and convincing account of what he was intending to write. He was not satisfied with the records already written of the reports of the eye-witnesses about what Jesus had said and done; he wanted something to complete it; and he had had the opportunity of making the most exact inquiries from the beginning; so he was determined to let his educated friend Theophilus have as accurate an account as it was possible to give.

Well then, this S. Luke, this beloved physician and companion of S. Paul, had been with him in his travels, and when Paul was in prison in Caesarea had lived for years either with Philip the Evangelist or in his company: and earlier he had gone up to Jerusalem with Mnason, one of the original disciples, and lived

with him; and he had obviously had close intercourse with people connected with the court of Herod, and with some of the circle of women who companied with our Lord, and after His death had been in Jerusalem, with Mary the Mother amongst them. He had been amongst all these; he had had full opportunities of inquiry; and he was a man quite capable of using his opportunities; and his accuracy has been extraordinarily vindicated, both in Gospel and Acts, where he touches upon the secular institutions and events of the empire. He has been vindicated from point to point as a very trustworthy historian. So we may read Luke's writings with the confidence with which we approach documents which we reasonably believe to be written by men well qualified to speak about the subject on which they are writing, and honest men who have no other desire or object than to tell us things as they were.

Now then read S. Mark's and S. Luke's Gospels. Put yourselves amongst these apostles; put yourselves amongst this little band; try to share their impressions, their experiences. They are under the fascination of this man—"The Son of Man" as He calls Himself; they had accepted His call; they had given up their

occupations and had come to be His disciples; they had joined His wandering band as missionaries of His kingdom; they were close to Him. Before they joined Him they had ideas about the Christ who was to come, but all these ideas had been scattered by the reality. They do not ask themselves yet any question about His person; only they are going through experiences the like of which plainly they had never gone through before. Here was one with authority. True, He was not a dogmatic teacher like the scribes. That is to say, He issued no dogmas; He uttered no formal instructions which His disciples must receive submissively, in virtue of His office. He was not a dogmatic teacher like the scribes. But He was a man who spoke "as one having authority." He seemed to have a like authority both in His words and in His works of power. So He impressed an outsider like the Roman Centurion, who knew what it was to have authority in the army—to say "to one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." That was what he did in the Roman Army. And when his boy was ill, he sent to Christ and said he really did not want to trouble Him to come

to his house; he was convinced that He was a man who could order and it would be done; he knew indeed that Jesus was subordinate to God, as he was to his commander, but under God He had such power that he did not doubt He could do what He pleased. So Jesus impressed him, an outsider.

Much more and in a deeper sense He impressed those first disciples. They were there when the paralysed man was told that his sins were forgiven. Introduced by the faith of his friends, he lay there helpless and was told his sins were forgiven; and when those who sat by were scandalized at such an absolution, there came those words "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed and walk." That was one of many instances. Then they heard Him speaking about the old commandments given by God to the Jews: "It was said to them of old time"; and here was one who dared to revise them. They were divine, those commandments; but now He had something new, something deeper, to inculcate by His mere word—"I say unto you." More than that, He had a strange way of speaking as the judge of all men in their secret hearts. "Many shall

come to me in that day." What day? What other day than the day of judgement? They will come with professions of effective service in the cause of Jesus. "Have I not called thee Lord? have I not done many wonderful works in thy name? Have I not taught in thy name? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you."

What a tremendous experience it must have been for them to be in the company of one who, they felt, was even now knowing and reading their thoughts, as many times He showed that He did; and one who seemed to claim by implication to be the ultimate and infallible judge even of men's secret lives, as again and again it appeared that He did. What an experience to be with such a one! And then plainly He seemed to be deliberately training them to trust Him utterly. In all physical emergencies, like the need for the feeding of the multitude, or the storm at sea, as in all spiritual perplexities, He was found adequate. He could save. It was not so much that He taught them this or that, or explained mysteries; but He led them to trust Him utterly. And whatever He said, there was a sound in His voice as of infallibility: "No man knoweth the Son save the Father, neither

knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him. Come unto me."

Well, you can imagine the effect of that experience more or less. As I say, they do not appear yet to have asked themselves questions about His person: and you cannot imagine Jesus breaking in abruptly with any statement of Godhead; there is nothing of that kind; that was very far off. And as I have said, an incarnation of God was something which a Jew would not have dreamed of. But it was something amazing and profound which was happening in their souls. It was that they found themselves passing into an attitude towards Jesus in which He had for them the values of God. And as we read that story it seems that such was His deliberate intention.

There was an old dilemma invented I think at the time of the Reformation: "either Jesus was God or He was not a good man"; and the modern critic often laughs at it as ridiculous. I do not think I can laugh at it as ridiculous. What is, after all, the worst kind of spiritual crime? Is it not spiritual arrogance? What makes men hate with a profound hatred the wrong sort of sacerdotalism? It is that it exercises tyranny over human souls. Every man

has the right to be himself; he ought not to be dominated or mastered by any other except God. God's service is perfect freedom; He can comprehend all; but for a man to put himself towards any other human soul as it were in the place of God, that is the supreme presumption; that, spiritually considered, is the sin of sins. Yet can I doubt as I read the Gospels that that is what was happening to the disciples? Jesus in their midst was coming to hold that place, which is the place of God, in their lives and in their minds; they did not know it; they could not have put it into words; but it was so. They called Him Christ; and what they meant by that was something much more than in their old days they had ever associated even with that great word. He was coming to have the place of God in their lives. Then there came the crash. Their dawning faith was smashed; it could not stand the test of His complete seeming failure. They saw Him deserted, a failure, crucified, dead. And then we know how their faith recovered, and they were absorbed in the light of His resurrection the third day from the dead; they were absorbed in the one great thought that God had reversed their mistaken human judgement; that the crucified Jesus truly was the Christ

and the Lord, exalted into glory. "Jesus is Lord." That was their creed. They were content with this at first. It was only later that the question appears to have presented itself to their minds—Can one be all that we are now treating Jesus as being, if He were simply at starting a man commissioned and anointed of God? Then the question began to present itself to their minds differently; and soon also the answer began to present itself to their minds.

We will follow the course of their spiritual history next Sunday. What I have tried to do to-day is to present to you the question in the way in which I think a thoughtful man ought to present it to himself. I think he ought to feel how strange it is that, after all these generations, the question should still be asked about the person of Jesus. It is only of Jesus we ask the question, "Is He more than man?"—of none other of the great ones of the earth. And we know why we ask it; we know why we cannot be satisfied with those humanitarian lives of Jesus. We read the story of the Gospels; we understand why men have said that He was God, vaguely or dogmatically. For at least here is something which cannot be expressed within the measure of humanity.

Can we think this picture is an invention? It is not like an invention. Can we say that the men who wrote these records, Mark and Luke, were not qualified to write them, or had not the opportunities of real knowledge, or seem to be writing under later influences? No, it is not so. This picture seems to be lifelike and original. So we put ourselves under the circumstances of these first disciples, and we find Christ Jesus growing upon their imagination, their minds, their faith, until, as I say, He was to them taking the place of God. How can this have been? The question must be answered; we cannot get rid of it.

My friends, it is fashionable to be sceptical to-day. Well now, we may desire that the authority of the church should have been of the sort—so conclusive and compulsory—that we could not venture to ask questions; but it has not been so. The church is a very divided thing, and it appears to us often to have misguided men. The history of the church is a chequered thing; it cannot compel our moral assent; it cannot make us feel it is wrong to ask any questions. No, we will question freely. It is plain that our Lord wished conviction about His person, and indeed on all spiritual subjects, to grow in His disciples' minds as

something which came *of themselves* under the divine leading. He did not dictate a doctrine about Himself to them, but wished it to come as the answer of their own minds: "Whom do ye say that I am?" So we will not fear to ask questions.

But on the other hand, if I read history quite frankly, I cannot possibly deny that the intellectuals of every epoch have misled people quite as badly as the priests. You cannot deny that. It is an extraordinary thing. The intellectuals have found out much; on their own ground they have made grand discoveries; but as to those principles which govern the general tendencies of life, the general theory of the world, they have misled people strangely at very different epochs. So we will not believe merely because the priests say so; nor will we disbelieve merely because the intellectuals say that it is foolish. We have got to trust our own judgement; that is one of the most courageous things you have got to do in life: you have got to trust your own best judgement, your own best reason, your own best self. You must win a conviction that you can really feel is your own; the sort of conviction which made Peter say, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And then Jesus solemnly blessed him

and said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." That is, Thou hast not borrowed it from some other person; it is something which has grown in thine own mind under the divine leading. That is the sort of conviction you want. May God give you grace to grow into such a conviction about Jesus Christ.

SERMON II

The Faith of the First Disciples

"What think ye of Christ? whose Son is he?"
S. Matt. xxii. 42.

LAST Sunday I was talking to you about a like momentous question. I pointed out to you what an extraordinary question it is—I mean in the form in which it presents itself to us to-day. There is no other human being about whom we dream of asking a like question. We acknowledge others to be supreme in intellect, to be geniuses, great men, saints; but about no one of them does the question suggest itself to our mind, whether we are to call him God. I pointed out to you also how easy it would have been for the world which worshipped gods many—the whole Gentile world, for whom the word God was not at all a "reserved" term—how easy it would have been for them to call one so full of power and holiness, as Jesus was, God. But for the Jew how seemingly impossible. So it would have seemed, because the

whole training of the Jew, under the teaching of the great prophets, had made the term God a reserved term indeed—the name of One only, the supreme, the maker of heaven and earth. Thus amidst all the varieties, higher and lower, of His creatures, from the lowest worm to the highest man—all these different elevations of dignity did not make even the highest creature anywhere nearer in essential being to his Creator. There was a difference than which no greater could be imagined, for on the one God all things hung in absolute dependence. He alone was self-existent.

Nevertheless, the God in whom the people of Israel had been taught to believe was not at all a God either inaccessible to man or indifferent to man; far from that. Rather, the God they believed in was one whose delight it was to be with the sons of men. He had made men with reason and freedom; that is, in His own image and likeness. He had made them to be His vicegerents for the carrying out of His purposes of love in this world. And when they disappointed Him by their sinfulness—disappointed Him so that He could not use them for His purposes—and they would not listen to Him, then He had not abandoned His purpose, but pursued it by the method of

divine election: He had chosen one among many, like Abraham, or one race among many, like Israel in Egypt, among the many children of Abraham. But still this narrow selection had no narrow purpose — always a purpose extending to all the world, the great purpose of redemption for all mankind. So He said that in Abraham all the families of the earth should be blessed. And the greatest visions which the Prophets offered to the mind and heart of Israel were visions of a spiritual extension which should embrace all the world. You remember these wonderful prophetic visions of the kingdom. Under all sorts of glorious imagery they express one idea, which is that God has a purpose for the whole world, and that in spite of all the rebellion of man His purpose is at last to be consummated. At the end of history God is to come into His own in the whole of His great creation; then shall be perfected the fellowship of God with man and man with his fellows. That is to be the end; that is the vision of the kingdom; and the centre of this kingdom is the anointed King of David's line—the Christ, as He alone came to be called—upon whom is named the very name of God. He is "Immanuel, God with us." "His name shall be called Wonderful,

Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father."

Christians look back to those words and see in them the very prophecy of the Incarnation; but the Jews never apparently dreamed or imagined that they meant more than that the name of God was to be on the anointed King who was to bring in God's glorious kingdom. Still all their hopes—the hopes of the pious, and the hopes of the restive, who pined as keen nationalists for the redemption of Israel from the foreign yoke—all the hopes of Israel were fastened upon the promises of the coming of the kingdom and the coming of the Christ.

The first disciples of our Lord had, some of them, been disciples of John the Baptist, and the function of that wonderful prophet was to proclaim that now the time was come, and God's purpose was about to be consummated—the kingdom was at hand, and he was the forerunner of that kingdom. And he had pointed them to the yet unknown figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the Greater One, the One who was to come, the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose. And they had joined the company of Jesus, after they had accepted His call.

Last Sunday we sought to estimate the im-

pression which in the years of His public ministry Jesus made upon these first disciples. It was an impression of unbounded authority; a wonderful authority of love and power which absorbed their very souls, and which they could not resist. They saw His wonderful works, they heard His wonderful words; they had at first no theory about His person, only they felt that there could be none greater than He. He came, as I said, to occupy the place of God in their mind and thought and heart. At last, at a critical moment, Jesus tested them with a great question. He had asked them first, "Whom do men say that I am?" and it was easy to answer that He was regarded as some wonderful prophet, about whom some supernatural account must be given; and many and various were the accounts given. But they had been closer to Him, longer with Him, and no such vague description was enough for them. Thus again He asked them, "Whom say ye that I am?" And then Peter uttered the great confession, "Thou art the Christ," and Jesus accepted it with His solemn benediction, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona." Already it was for them a time of great anxiety; already the clouds had begun to lower, and their hearts

were sorely stricken; already it was obvious that the religious leaders of their people were against Him, the Scribes and Pharisees; already also it was obvious that, if the common people heard Him gladly and were glad enough to receive His miraculous benefits of healing, yet there were very few of them who were at all disposed to become His disciples. What was going to be the end of it? It was with anxious hearts that they made their first confession; and at once He began to tell them the worst, and you remember with what dramatic suddenness this disclosure follows Peter's confession. "From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and the third day raised up." "The third day raised up"—they quite missed that; but that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die, that they understood, and it was too much. Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee." But He turned upon Peter and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-block unto me; for thou mindest not the things of God but the things of men."

Let us follow out this great tragedy of

misunderstanding. Judea and Galilee were seething with nationalism, and chief of these nationalists were the Zealots, the most fanatical and extreme, and there was a Zealot amongst our Lord's disciples, and they were all of them inspired with these nationalist aspirations. They wanted success; but Jesus pointed them to quite another picture, the picture which is to our minds very prominent in the Old Testament, but which the Jews had apparently left quite out of sight — that picture of the Servant of Jehovah, of which the central expression is in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah which you know so well, and which we cannot hear or read without feeling that it is simply a history written beforehand of Jesus Christ. "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Therefore through sacrifice, through death, through the offering of His

soul as a ransom, He shall find Himself the head of the new Israel, He shall become the head of a new race, the diffuser of the new righteousness. Again and again Jesus presses on them this picture. That was the destiny of the Son of Man; that was what was to happen to Him.

There was another current picture of a Son of Man in glory, closing the history of this world in tremendous judgement upon the wicked and opening the world to come to all the righteous—a picture based upon the famous vision of the Book of Daniel—and He pointed to that picture also; but as yet they had no ears for anything except the gloomy message of failure and death, and they could not bear it. There is no tragedy in the world more moving than the tragedy of the failure of these disciples' faith. We ought not to be amazed at it: it is the same with innumerable human souls. What is it that makes faith difficult, that glorious faith of the Bible and the church? Well, it is the oppressive sense of weakness in our own souls and in the world about us. These glorious promises seem to come up dead against a brick wall. The brick wall which seems to resist this faith is the brick wall of seeming failure within and without, and the

appalling weakness of God and His cause. So it is that there are multitudes—both orthodox and unbelieving multitudes—whose faith (in the real sense of faith) has failed under this tragedy of God's seeming weakness. The cry of Christ, "My God, my God, why didst thou forsake me?"—the utter seeming failure and shame is too much for them. They cannot believe in Him; they cannot see the glory hidden in the suffering Christ. So it was with the disciples.

And then you know how the great tranformation came about. He rose again the third day from the dead. On that third morning they found the tomb empty. I think, if you are prepared to believe in God and in history, you must believe that they found that tomb empty. And more than that, you must believe that, only a few weeks after the desperate failure of their courage and their faith, you find that same band of men quite tranformed in spirit. They were not imaginative men, not visionary men, but sturdy working men of an unimaginative kind, as the records show us; and they were men differing in character, given to jealousies among themselves, which Jesus rebuked. Well, this whole group you see in a few days totally transformed, from the weak,

vacillating failures they had proved, into a group which can confront the world for a seemingly impossible task with unswerving and undying courage.

What was it that had brought about the great change? They all gave the same testimony. This change in themselves had been wrought by an experience which had forced itself upon them—the experience of the appearances of the Risen Jesus. The tomb was empty; they had wondered; but He had come among them here and there—not as in His old natural body when He had lived in one place, in Jerusalem or Galilee, and had walked from place to place like any other man, but as one who had passed to a higher sphere and yet could materialize Himself amongst them so as even to eat and drink with them. And it was all with one object—to make it clear that through failure and through death He was risen, and was passing to the glory of God at the right hand of the Father. And so at last they saw Him go, and they faced the world with a frank, indisputable courage bred of the conviction that "Jesus was Lord." Again it was a few days, and lo! the Spirit, which He had promised, came down upon them with intoxicating power, and they knew that He, the living Jesus, at

God's right hand was working within them to make them His organ and instrument for the conversion of the world.

Well now, it is very interesting to read the record of the early chapters in the Acts and see what they believed about Him. Their whole souls were absorbed in the thought of the Risen Jesus, whom God had exalted by His right hand and made both Lord and Christ. At present they had apparently no thoughts about Him except as the glorified Christ. Had He existed before He was born as a child in Bethlehem? They do not seem yet to have asked themselves that question.

Think how S. Peter is content to preach Jesus of Nazareth—"the word that God sent unto the Children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)—that saying ye yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Not, you observe, "He was the Son of God," but "God was with him"—the man Jesus. "And we are

witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he which is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. And to him bear all the prophets witness, that through him every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins."[1]

You cannot but perceive that the question of pre-existence or divine personality does not seem yet to have presented itself to Peter's mind. And yet all these days or months, Jesus was holding the very position of God to the souls of the disciples. He is "Lord of all": on Him men are to believe: from Him they are to receive remission of sins and the gift of the Divine Spirit: He is the judge of quick and dead: to Him they pray, as Stephen did at the hour of his death, calling upon the Lord and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he knelt down, and cried with a loud

[1] Acts x. 36–43.

voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." This very word "Lord," by which they had learned to call Jesus—think of it. It was a vague word of respect in itself. But "Lord of all" was a title of God. And Lord was the word by which the Greek Bible translated Jehovah. As you read the New Testament you see how the one use passed into the other; sometimes it is hard to say whether by the Lord they mean Jesus or Jehovah. Finally both meanings coalesce—the two uses of the title have become one. It has passed into their minds that that self-revealing God, Jehovah, the God of their fathers, is the Lord whom they worship, Jesus their Master. But, as I suppose, Peter was no man to form a theory or doctrine about Christ. The man who, so to speak, explained the church to itself was the later-called and converted apostle, Paul.

S. Paul was a man of much higher education and intellect: intellect has its uses in religion as well as its abuses. After he was converted, and after his first bold witness that "Jesus was the Son of God" or "Jesus was Christ," he went into retirement, first in Arabia and then at his native town of Tarsus. People often forget that. He may have done some mission-

ary work from Tarsus: but for some nine years after his conversion, S. Paul was apparently on the whole in retirement—I suppose thinking out his new position. And that is why his message afterwards was so consistent and so ready throughout all the days of his missionary life. He was not in a hurry to begin; he retired and thought it all out and saw the meaning of it all. Yes, he saw that this Jesus whom the church was worshipping and adoring as its Lord, who had for them (in our modern phrase) the values of God, could be so thought of and worshipped only because He really was so. He saw the meaning of it all; he saw the meaning of the term the Son of God, which does not appear in the Acts, till it is put in S. Paul's mouth after his conversion. It meant that Jesus did not begin to exist when He was born a human child; no, He had been the Father's very Son before that, all through the ages. He it was through whom God was always manifesting Himself; He it was through whom God made the worlds;[1] He it was through whom He had been holding them together, for "in him all things consist";[2] He was the Lord always; He had been always coming. He had been present

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 6. [2] Col. i. 16–17.

with God's people in the Old Testament;[1] and now at the last He had come. "In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, his own Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem them that were under the law"[2] and to bring in the universal Gospel.

So S. Paul saw it. He had thought it out; his doctrine is wonderfully accurate. Listen to what he says in the Epistle to the Philippians: "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"—that is His humility. And what does he find to be the essence of His humility? Why, that He, Jesus, "existing in the form of God," that means having the essential qualities or nature of God, "counted not this equality with God as a prize to be clutched at, but (abandoning those glorious privileges of His divine condition) emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (that is the essential character of the servile nature of man), being made in the likeness of men (not only really man, but common man, like other men), and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient, unto death, yea the death of the cross; wherefore also God highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus

[1] 1 Cor. x. 4. [2] Gal. iv. 4, 5; Rom. viii. 32.

every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."[1]

Yes, S. Paul saw it quite clearly — that glorious exaltation of the man to the throne of God could not have been, man could not have borne "the Name that is above every name," or become the object of universal worship, had it not been that before ever the world was He was in the being of God, in eternal fellowship as the Son with the Father.

I have said nothing about S. John's witness, because the learned world has in great part satisfied itself that S. John's Gospel was not written by John the apostle but was the work of some later disciple; not a history but an allegory, representing not the experience of the apostle but the later mind of the church. A great part of the learned world has made up its mind to that effect; so it is better to begin with the other Gospels and the Acts and S. Paul's Epistles. Nevertheless I do myself firmly, and after all examination, believe that it is only at the bottom the refusal of the supernatural which leads to that rejection of S. John's

[1] Phil. ii. 5–11.

authorship. I think the evidence is fairly overwhelming that the Fourth Gospel was really written by John the apostle and that you must accept its testimony as John's.

The doctrine of John, then, about Christ's person, which he sums up in the prologue of his Gospel, is in effect the same as S. Paul's —that the Word or self-expression of the Father, who is also His only-begotten Son, was eternally with the Father, and was God, and from the beginning of time was the instrument of all creation, and the light lightening every man in reason and conscience: that the darkness of sin never overwhelmed the light: that all along He was coming into the world: and at last He came. And he gives expression to that coming in the words, "the Word was made flesh" (the highest took the lowest) "and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." And then he tells a story of the incarnate life which seems to me necessary at many points to make up a coherent picture, supplementing the other Gospels. And he lets us understand that Jesus did from time to time during His ministry bear solemn witness to His Sonship in a sense which left no doubt about His pre-existence, though it made

no impression apparently on the disciples' minds at the time; and he tells us also how eight days after the resurrection Thomas, in reaction from his temporary refusal of belief in Christ's resurrection, had burst out into the full confession of faith in Him—"My Lord and my God!"

Well, is this the truth—that Jesus is the eternal Son of God incarnate? Or was it an imaginative invention of S. Paul's mind, adopted by the other leaders of the church? I cannot think so. I see in the records a wonderful growth in the faith of the disciples till it reaches the supreme point, and the facts by which it grew justify the resultant belief. No other belief really could account for them. S. Paul's service to the church was that he first was able to put it into words: but it was not due to him. This is plain to me in part for three reasons which I can only briefly mention.

1. In the Synoptic Gospels (as the first three are called) you find sayings of our Lord about Himself, of the most unquestionable genuineness, which cannot have proceeded from a mere man: and that although it was not our Lord's way to burst with dogmatic disclosures, like thunderclaps, upon the disciples' minds. It was His way not to assert, but to leave them

to infer, the mystery of His person. But listen —"All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son save the Father, neither knoweth any one the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."[1] He who here offers rest to men's souls by their coming to Him, can do so because at the ground of His being is a unique fellowship with God, a fellowship of mutual knowledge as of a son with a father, which but through Him none can share. Is not such exclusive mutual knowledge of Father and Son something which betokens identity of nature? Again, listen to the words in which He disclaims knowledge of the time of the end, in which He declares that He has not—as He then was, at least—the map of the future spread before His eyes. "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son."[2] Is not this a superangelic sonship of which He speaks? Once more consider the parable of the husbandmen,[3] in which He contrasts Himself as Son with the prophetic ser-

[1] S. Matt. xi. 25–30; S. Luke x. 21, 22.
[2] S. Matt. xxiv. 36; S. Mark xiii. 32.
[3] S. Mark xii. 1–12, and parallel in S. Matt. and S. Luke

vants of God, differentiating and distinguishing Himself. Can you doubt the force of such words?

2. But the argument which impresses me more than particular words is what I have already suggested—that there appears in the whole narrative of our Lord's dealings with the disciples a deliberate purpose to train them to trust Him so unreservedly and so utterly, as that He came to hold towards their souls—increasingly before their faith failed them and completely after it was recovered—the place which God only can rightly hold towards the soul of man. It is not for a mere man to be the all-sufficient refuge and reliance of the souls of his fellows. But Jesus led His disciples so to believe on Him as that they must discover Him to be either God or one usurping His place.

3. And then, lastly, S. Paul was not very popular with all parts of the church. He was, in fact, even bitterly persecuted by the narrowly Jewish section, and his doctrine, in those respects in which men thought it dangerous or strange, was travestied and vehemently attacked. But about all this teaching on the pre-existence of Jesus and the incarnation there was not, as far as we

can discern, a word of controversy or a murmur of dissent. It had been given to S. Paul first to give it clear expression; but all the apostolic fellowship seems to have recognized it and accepted it as the utterance of its own faith.

I do not know how it stands with you. It is not Jesus of Nazareth who will blame us for asking questions or for wanting to know the reason why. He will lead you gradually as He led His disciples. If you are in doubt He will deal with you gently as He dealt with Thomas. Only surely that record of the growth of the apostles' faith, and the sense (of which we shall be thinking later on) of the difference which it makes to human souls so to believe, will move you to your depths, and you will ask yourself in all seriousness that question—Can there be any other explanation of that person than the one which I find in S. Paul and S. John? And you will pray with all your heart that the almighty and ever-loving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith did once suffer His holy apostle Thomas to be doubtful, will grant to you at last, as to him, so to believe in His Son Jesus Christ that your faith in His sight may never be reproved.

SERMON III

Definitions and Objections

"Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."—*S. John* xx. 28.

I HAVE been asking you on the past two Sundays to consider how it was that those first disciples were brought to this belief—that the man Jesus with whom they had companied so long, and whom they had seen die upon the Cross, was truly and really their Lord and God; and that, though they had been brought up in the strict faith of the Jews that there was only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and that the name of God must not be given to any other.

We are all interested in psychology nowadays. It is a very interesting study—the psychology of the group of disciples—how their profound reverence for their Lord and awe of Him and love of Him, how their experience of His authority, both in His works and in His words, brought them to an attitude of such absolute trust in Him, and that apparently

under His deliberate training, as to put Him as it were in the place of God in their souls. We have watched how their newly-won faith broke down under the strain of His rejection and His death, and how it was brought to life again in an intensified form by their experience of His resurrection—as they understood how truly, through all seeming weakness, He was Lord—Lord of all and Prince of Life. Now they worshipped Him, they prayed to Him, they trusted Him utterly. They went forward with a new and whole-hearted confidence such as only the pressure of objective facts could have produced on their honest but by no means visionary minds. But still, as I showed you, they had not begun to think *how* it could all be. They had no theory. It was simply that they had been brought by an irresistible experience to worship as the Lord of Glory that Jesus who had died and was raised again and had been lifted to the right hand of God.

There are people who tell us that our religious emotions can do without logic, that our intellects have no place in our religion ; but it cannot be so. We are rational beings ; we must ask questions ; we must know the reason of things. So it was that the first Christians could not but proceed to a theory or doctrine of Jesus.

And the man who was to help them to this, under God, was the converted Pharisee, Saul who is called Paul. And there, in his epistles, and later in the writings of S. John, you get an account of this doctrine or theory as it was disclosed to them—how it was that Jesus could be to the disciples all that in experience they had found Him. It was for one reason only, because, though He was really man, He was not merely man: nor did He begin His existence with His human birth. In manhood He was truly Son of God, and before the world was He had ever been the Son—"God only-begotten who is in the bosom of the Father."[1]

Well, there is no doubt about it, that is the teaching of the New Testament about the Person of Jesus Christ. It is there explicit in S. Paul, in S. John, and in the unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. And there was, as it seems, no dispute about it. It is implied plainly enough in the language of S. Peter and S. James. It is the doctrine then of the New Testament as a whole.

But it was not first the doctrine of a book. While the New Testament was being written, it was the doctrine of a society—the church. In Protestant circles there has been always a

[1] 1 S. John i. 18, R.V. marg.

tendency to be jealous of the church as something that somehow comes between the soul of man and God or His word. And nowadays from a rather different point of view, there is an alienation from, or a resentment of, what is called institutional religion—which means the church. Yet there is no question that Christianity did come into the world as a visible institution or church, bound together by outward and visible sacraments and facts. Further, it was only because it was a church, a visible institution, that it succeeded in maintaining the faith for which it stood. The idea of the church was that it did not stand on any ultimate authority of its own; what had created it was the word, the message, the act of God; and on that it stood. That first Christian church, remember, did not go out into an uneducated, barbarous world such as it had to work in after the downfall of the empire five centuries later. It went out into a very highly educated world, very philosophical and very full of argument. It had to maintain itself in view of seething intellectual contentions, and rival tenets such as would have been, if they had been admitted within it, subversive of its fundamental principles. Thus it had to know its own mind; and there

is not, I think, in history anything which comes so near to the idea of a corporate mind, a society acting as a person, as you find when you look back upon that early church. It is like a person being questioned: Do you mean this? Do you mean that? Are you prepared to affirm this? Are you prepared to deny that? Individual teachers made many mistakes; they made them in haste and they were corrected at leisure. But what you see is a corporate mind forming itself and then expressing itself. It did not really add anything at all to the teaching of S. Paul and S. John; it simply defended it and formulated it; and I want briefly to explain to you what those decrees or dogmas, as they are called, were, by which the church protected its doctrine of the Person of Christ.

First of all, it decided to exclude a view that might seem at first sight very natural, which was maintained by a parish priest of Alexandria called Arius early in the fourth century. "We have in Jesus Christ," he said in effect, "a being called the Son who is something between the Supreme God and all the other creatures; we can worship Him, we can treat Him as God, but really He is a creature, only higher than all other creatures and the instrument

through which God made and deals with them." But this the corporate mind of the church said emphatically would not do. Here they saw the pagan principle of demigods; and the doctrine of the Prophets on which they stood would not allow of demigods. There can be no half-way house between the Creator and the creature. So they said, We cannot tolerate that doctrine, which would undermine our very basis. And they determined to insert into the Creed words about our Lord, as "very God of very God "and "of one substance with the Father." By this they meant simply that He belongs to the eternal reality which God is. If you think of God in His eternal self before ever the world was, you must not think of Him as a solitary monad or point. There was in God eternal life and what is necessary to life—fellowship; there was Father and Son and Spirit. The basis of all fellowship lies in God Himself, and in that fellowship He is indissolubly one. Froude tells an interesting story of Thomas Carlyle: how he heard him in his younger days denouncing the church for having made so great a fuss over a mere diphthong (the difference between two Greek words meaning "of one substance" and "of like substance"). So Carlyle denounced the church "in broad

Annandale." But the time came when he felt bound to admit he had made a great mistake. He now saw that, if the Arians had won, Christianity would have dwindled away to a legend; it would have merged itself in all those surrounding beliefs in demigods whereby the distinction between God and man, between the Creator and the creature, was gradually obliterated. So it was the church said No to Arius: we can only treat the Son as God if He is really and originally God.

But again, in his zeal for the Godhead of Christ, another prominent Churchman called Apollinarius developed a theory that our Lord was man as regards His body and natural life, but that in Him the place of the human mind was taken by the divine mind; so that you have in Him the divine mind incorporated in a human body. So he thought to secure the immutable holiness of the Lord. But again the church said an emphatic No. It was as man He was tempted, it was as man He suffered anxieties and submitted Himself to the limitations of human ignorance; therefore He was mentally as well as corporally human; He was fully and completely man in all that makes up a man.

Then once again, from another source, came

the idea that if He is man and completely man, He must be a self-complete human person, although joined to God never so closely. The child called Jesus, who was born of Mary, was a man, not God, though God united Himself to Him in the closest fellowship. Again the church said No — that deprives us of our Gospel of salvation. In being joined to Jesus we are joined to God. It was really the eternal person of the Son who came down to be born and dwell as man, and who submitted Himself to the limitations and sufferings of human nature; Mary was the mother (in respect of His manhood) of one who was and is very God. There is in Jesus but one continuous personality and that divine.

Once again attacks were made upon the permanence and completeness of our Lord's manhood, some thinking of His manhood as somehow merged in the Godhead, others at a later date denying to Him the reality of a human will. But the church again said No. Whatever belongs to manhood, the full, complete, and distinct activity, mental as well as physical, of man, belongs to the Incarnate Son and belongs to Him for ever; there can be no merging of Godhead and manhood. In that one person there must remain the two natures.

All this you observe was negative work; it was saying No to certain theories which would subtly but effectively have undermined the faith in the divine Redemption—namely that the very Son of God, out of the very being of God, had come down to take our human nature and redeem it from within. These refusals or condemnations are of the greatest value. But their value is negative. If you want to know positively what the Incarnation means, you must still go back to the Gospels for the facts and to the Epistles for the doctrine. It is of the greatest importance to keep this constantly in mind. For the dogmatic decisions of the Councils, as happens too often with the best things, have been greatly abused—to obscure rather than protect the historical picture of Christ and the best thought of His inspired interpreters.

I cannot read the Gospels and Epistles without seeing in them the profound and illuminating inspiration of the Spirit of God. I believe the promises to the apostles that the Holy Spirit of truth should bring all things to their remembrance that Jesus said unto them (even though they were then buried in their unconscious minds) and should guide them into all the truth and bear witness of Jesus, were really

spoken by the Lord[1] and were really fulfilled; and surely we have their fruit in the New Testament. Again, I cannot study the early church and its dogmatic decisions without feeling sure that the same Holy Spirit was with the church, forming its mind and directing its judgement to protect alike the real doctrine of God and the full reality of our Lord's manhood in body, soul, and spirit. But we cannot deny the imperfection of the church's witness in later ages to the reality of His manhood. Zeal for His Godhead has been allowed to obscure the reality of His human struggle, His human limitations, and the fascination of His human spirit. This has led to inevitable reactions, and it has been left to men like Shelley, and the author of *Ecce Homo*, and other of more recent date, who deny or minimize or leave out of sight the superhuman and divine features in our Lord's person, to emphasize afresh the glories of His real manhood, which the church ought never to have suffered to be obscured.

In this connection there is one phrase, which I think has no place in the dogmatic decisions of the church, but which has been constantly used by orthodox writers, which has caused

[1] S. John xiv. 26; xvi. 13; xv. 26.

serious trouble—I mean the phrase which describes our Lord's manhood as *impersonal.* You cannot surely read the Gospels and say that the manhood of Jesus was not an individual and intensely personal manhood. What the phrase means is that His personality did not begin with His human birth—that there was one continuous personality of the Son of God. That is certainly true unless S. Paul and S. John are utterly mistaken. But when He "was made flesh" the manhood which He took found its personality in Him, and He so truly accepted humanity as to live and work and think and struggle and believe under human conditions and human limitations. This was no failure of divine power, but the fullness of divine sympathy and mercy: and God declares His almighty power most chiefly in such an act of sympathy: and I suppose that such becoming man was possible for God because man was created originally in the image of God, and this manhood can therefore become the organ in which God can express Himself without ceasing to be human.

I find no help in understanding this except in great phrases of S. Paul's. He has specially two of which I would remind you. In

one[1] he speaks to the Corinthians of our Lord as having beggared Himself: "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich." He is speaking of His coming down into our manhood. He means that our Lord, in some sense which we can very imperfectly understand, really abandoned something in order to be able to live and suffer and struggle under the limitations and conditions of a proper manhood and so to enrich it.

S. Paul also uses another significant phrase, "he emptied himself"[2] in his Epistle to the Philippians. In taking the reality of our human nature He emptied Himself of things which belonged to equality with God. Do not let us try too much to pry into mysteries which are beyond us. We can get no psychological theory of what is unique, I suppose. Agnosticism is a very good thing if you put it in the right place: for there are a great many things of which, with our limited capacity, we can have no adequate theory. But I say that there is no sufficient account to be given of Jesus, in view of all the facts, except that which declares that He truly was the eternal Son of the Father, and out

[1] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [2] Phil. ii. 7.

of the Being of God came down and was born and lived and suffered and died under the limitations of a real human nature that He might exalt our human nature into the fellowship of God. That is it.

Now next week I am going to say something about what is in a way the greatest subject of all—that is the practical effect of this belief: its real value in practical life; why it is worth while fighting for it; why it is worth while going through all mental pain to get it clear to yourselves. But to-night before I stop I must say something about two objections which are made to this doctrine of the Incarnation.

There are, of course, as many objections as there are objectors. But I can only now call your attention to two which are typical. There is indeed a third about which I shall find myself talking next week, please God—that is the difficulty which so many people find in the fact or impression that our Lord talked of the end of the world as coming immediately; and that therein He must have been palpably deceived and mistaken. About our Lord's supposed delusions I shall find myself for another reason talking next Sunday. I leave that subject now.

But (1) there is a particular word of Jesus which, they say, is surely inconsistent with

your doctrine of His real Godhead. It was His reply to the rich young man who came to Him and said "Good Master," when He repudiated, as it seems, the title to goodness. He said, "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God."[1] But I think that it must be a mistake to suppose that our Lord repudiates goodness. Read our Lord's dealings with His disciples in the Gospels, and you cannot think that He did not claim to be good. No; He was always putting Himself in that relation to them as guide and teacher and example, which one can only do if he is supremely and consciously good. There was not in all our Lord's words the slightest sign of the consciousness of sin or of the fear of going wrong. Certainly He cannot have repudiated goodness. But this young man came in a flattering spirit. It was a cheap thing to say "Good Master"; and what Jesus really meant was, I think, exactly this: "Young man, think what you are saying when you call me good." He did not either deny that He was good, nor did He say that He was God and therefore good; all He said was "This goodness which you are searching for is to be found in God only: do not lightly ascribe the title to man."

[1] S. Mark x. 18.

I cannot stop over the matter: but there are three or four occasions when you will find our Lord doing this very interesting thing—seeking to make men feel the importance of intellectual sincerity and consistency, so that they shall not be able to make glib statements or use convenient arguments which they cannot really abide by or be satisfied with. Thus He challenges the habitual statement of the scribes that the Christ was to be the son of David by pointing to the psalm, held to be David's, where He is addressed as Lord, and asking them how David could call his son "Lord."[1] Or when they objected to Him that He was making Himself equal with God because He called Himself His Son, He confronts them with the psalm where the title "God" is applied to the magistrates.[2] On these and perhaps other occasions our Lord appears not to be maintaining or teaching anything either about Himself or about Scripture, but simply urging on men the duty of thinking, before they speak, whether this or that convenient assertion or objection can really be made by them consistently or conscientiously—whether there is not something involved in their own admitted principles which would make such an assertion

[1] S. Mark xii. 35. [2] S. John x. 36.

or objection impossible or insincere. This is a warning which men profoundly need in all generations.

(2) But there is another and deeper difficulty which a great many people feel. They say, "I cannot really think of our Lord as God without dehumanizing Him. I want a Christ who really could go wrong; I want a Christ whom I can think of as my example by being under exactly my own conditions—as better than me, but as no way in His relations to God different from me. Then He can help me, but only then; otherwise you dissolve the reality of His manhood." Now this is a very real difficulty; and when you get a real difficulty you should always follow it out bravely, until you get to the light, instead of being afraid of it. What is the truth about this matter of example? The truth appears to be that the value of example depends upon identity of conditions. Example tells with immense effect amongst boys in the same school, amongst members of the same profession, amongst contemporaries in the same nation; but any fundamental difference of conditions weakens almost to annihilation the power of example. If I tell a very poor man living in a very small house "You take my example of temperance! I don't go to the

public-house"—what does he think? "Your example, my good sir, is worth precisely nothing to me; you have got a nice comfortable room; you have not got noisy children, and the washing hanging up to make your room distasteful; your example is nothing to me." Thus any real difference of conditions almost destroys the value of example. So also does distance in time or space: I do not think much of the example of the Indian ascetics or ancient Spartans. So again a touch of genius almost destroys the power of example. I do not imagine that I could write a tragedy because Shakespeare could.

Now in all these ways Jesus on the mere human level, as one man among millions, would seem very far off. His mere example would never have produced a permanent effect upon the sons of men. We should have been content to venerate Him as an inexplicable genius. But the very thing which seems to take Him furthest from us is what brings Him nearest to us—He was man, but He was the New Man. What in one form or another He is always teaching is that what we need most is a fresh start and a new birth. And He shows us an actual and arresting example of what human nature may be in closest union with God. It

is a wonderful thing. Cynicism is for ever silent in the face of Jesus of Nazareth; there is indeed a life worth living. So He confronts us with the ideal—the New Man—even if it only makes us feel our sinfulness.

Again He seems to say, You want a fresh start free from the burden and guilt of sins and evil habits; I will acquit you, I will set you free. That is the absolution which He wins for us by His sacrifice of Himself. Wholly without regard to the multitude and magnitude of our sins, He sets us free to begin again.

But both the example and the sacrifice would have been of no use to us if we had been left just as we were before—a prey to evil within and without. But no! Jesus, crucified and risen, becomes the fount of a new life by His Spirit. He can dwell *in* men and in each man. He can actually by His Spirit communicate to each of them all the richness of His manhood to renew and purge and cleanse theirs. That is the doctrine which S. Paul and S. John preached: Christ in you by His Spirit the hope of glory.

But Christ can only be *in all men* because He is more than man; because He is verily creative spirit; because He is really God who has taken our manhood, and through it,

spiritualized and glorified, can, by His Spirit, live in the hearts of men. Now I can look at that example of Jesus so awfully above me without despair. One so sinless, so pure, must be too high for me, I thought. But no; that same Jesus who has given me deliverance from all the past, and offered me a fresh start—that same Jesus lives by His Spirit in me to reproduce—if I will have it so, if my will is ready—to reproduce in me that very life of which He shows me the pattern outwardly. It is Christ living in me by His Spirit who makes it possible for me to follow and rise to that example which He set before my eyes. It is the Christ from heaven by His Spirit working within men, to mould them inwardly into the likeness of the pattern which He once showed them outwardly, that has made His example through all the ages, like the example of no other man, everlastingly effective and fruitful. That is to say, it is just that supernatural, positively divine background of His manhood—exactly what made it so sinless and, at first sight, so remote—which, when I come to understand His method and His purpose, alone makes it available and close at hand and effective in influence for me and for all men.

SERMON IV

The Difference it Makes

"Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."—*Col.* i. 12.

I HAVE been trying on these Sundays in Advent to represent to you how it was that the first disciples of Jesus Christ came to answer as they finally did that question "What think ye of Christ?" I have sought to describe to you their experiences when they found themselves, as it were, scholars of that wonderful Master. I have sought to describe to you their dawning faith and then the collapse of that faith under the strain of His seeming failure and death; and how it revived, immutably planted on a rock, under the experience of His resurrection — how they found themselves putting their whole soul into the affirmation of their faith that Jesus is the Lord. That was the first stage; and the record of it you read in the early chapters of the Acts. There you see how Jesus, the unseen risen Jesus, who had

sent down upon them His own Spirit, stood to them in such a relation, and they to Him, that you can only describe it by saying that He had for them the values of God; they put in Him the kind of faith which can only be given to God.

But as yet they do not appear to have asked themselves the question "How can this be? How can we so worship Him and trust Him—the man with whom we were in daily companionship, whom we have seen and known as man among men?" And then I sought to show you how it was that, first under the guidance of S. Paul, those first Christians reached their complete faith; how they passed from saying "Jesus is the Lord" to saying "Jesus is the Son of God, the eternal Son who for us men and for our salvation was incarnate, was made man, and died for us and rose again, and by His Spirit lives in us and will come again to accomplish the kingdom of God." It is this faith that is expressed in the New Testament as a whole. It is the faith of the catholic church; it is the meaning of its creeds.

And to-night I am to ask you to consider what a difference it makes—in our own lives and in our hopes for the world—to hold this faith. It

is important to consider this, because of course there are a great many people who resent what, perhaps without giving much accurate thought to it, they call dogma. What difference does it make, they are disposed to ask, what exactly we believe about Jesus Christ so long as we take Him for our example? That is the kind of attitude of mind which I have in view. I want to ask you to consider what practical difference it makes—this holding to the faith of the catholic church in the Incarnation, in Jesus Christ as very God in very manhood.

Well, first of all, do not make the mistake of supposing that those who hold this faith believe that apart from it mankind has no real knowledge of God. Christianity is not a narrow faith. It teaches us to believe that, wherever men have been, there has always been in their reason and conscience some light of God; His Word is the "light that lighteneth every man." Thus Christianity has no interest whatever in disparaging other religions, or in looking jealously at the elements of truth which they contain. The real Christian will be open to the light whencesoever it comes. In art, in science, in philosophy, in poetry, in all the religions of the world, Christianity will expect and welcome the light. Only it will not be satisfied,

because it has reason to know that there is something more.

After all, the moral conscience, and the arguments of reason, and the intimations of science, and the visions of artists, and all the natural religions of the world, have left men sorely perplexed; and God has given us something more. "In many parts and in many manners he spake of old times unto the fathers by the prophets; and in these last times by one who was more than a prophet, by his Son." That is the special self-disclosure, self-revelation of God of which the Bible gives us the record. It was given through a narrow channel but for a universal purpose; it was given through the narrow channel of that one little and, as it would seem, insignificant race of Israel, but it came to a climax in Jesus Christ. There it reached finality and there it was made serviceable for a universal purpose. It became the religion in which all the world is destined, so far as it has a good will, to find its satisfaction—not by exclusion of the measures of divine knowledge which men had already attained, but by the inclusion in a more comprehensive light of all the partial rays which had already visited them.

The finality of the Christian faith! That is

the point. If you come to think of it, it is necessarily involved in the idea of the Incarnation. If these disciples of Jesus came really, as I have tried to show you, to a true estimate of His person, there is in Him a necessary finality. There can be no self-disclosure of God to man, and no relationship of man to God, completer or fuller for this world than what is involved in Him who is the Word made flesh. There the highest and the lowest are brought together absolutely; there God and man are one; there the inscrutable and difficult things of God are translated into the intelligible lineaments of a human character; and there human life is brought morally and spiritually to its best. Christ Jesus is He that should come, and there is no meaning in looking for any other beyond Him. Faith in Him is the final religion.

But here the progressive mind stumbles. Surely, it says, things advance. It was two thousand years ago that Jesus Christ lived and wrought in the world, and we do not know how much longer the world is going to last. Do you seriously mean that mankind is always to look back for perfection to that remote point in the past? Well, there were progressives in S. John's day too; they were beginning to be

called "Gnostics"; they prided themselves on their superior knowledge, and they despised the simple faith of that young catholic church. You know what S. John says of them in his second Epistle. He is talking to those who were in some danger of adopting the opinions of these progressives—"Look to yourselves," he says, "that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive the full reward. Whosoever goeth onward"—progresses, that is the word—"and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting; for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works."[1] You see what he means. He means that the highest spiritual hope for men is really bound up in this faith in the Incarnation; if they let that go in the name of a false progress they let go the ground of their hope and the whole of their certainty about God.

But we must make no mistake; Christianity is very far indeed from being an unprogressive religion. Its finality in Jesus Christ is the very ground of progress; for the glorified

[1] 2 S. John 8–11.

Jesus in the heavens is a spring of new life for humanity. Moreover, He has made the church to be His body, His organ, His instrument for self-revelation, and that self-revelation to the world through the church is gradual. It was but a very little of what is meant by Christianity that was apparent to that first church at Jerusalem where they were all Jews. It required the genius of the Greeks, their subtle and powerful intellect, to bring out the meaning of the church's message. Christianity was a poor thing without that great Greek church ; its theory, its theology we owe to the Greeks. But they were a little too intellectual. So it needed the Roman race, with its magnificent gift of government and law, to show the power of the church to discipline the new races which were surging in over the old Empire and laying the foundations of our modern Europe. And as these new nations grew to strength each national church has exhibited special gifts, and brought out some special aspects of the meaning of the Christian faith. So it has been with the Irish Church, and the French Church, the Church of England, the Russian Church ; without any one of them there would have been something missing.

And still we believe we need the Japanese Church and the Indian Church and the Korean Church and the African Church. Aye, we need the contribution which every generation and each single individuality is capable of giving to bring out the full meaning of what is in Christ. That is, I suppose, what S. Paul means when he speaks of the "Church which is his body, the fulfilment of him who is being all in all fulfilled." That is it; Christ is present Himself by His Spirit in the great catholic society as perfect God and perfect Man: and it requires all the particular churches and all the individuals one after the other, and all the developments of knowledge and circumstance, to bring out gradually the full meaning of His person and of the faith in Him. Only the faith itself cannot change; it remains the same. The principle of the Incarnation must be recognized to be final by its very essence; for, as I said, there can be no disclosure of God to man and no relationship of man to God completer or fuller than in Him who is the Word made flesh, in whom the highest and the lowest are one, and the inaccessible things of God are translated into the intelligible lineaments of a human character, the standard for all time.

Now I want you to feel the practical value of that finality. Men drift hither and thither; our age is in a chaotic confusion of mind. What is it we need? It is a clear and distinct understanding of the character, will, and purpose of God. In all the shocks of the War, under the strain of intolerable losses, men and women were asking, "Can it be really so that God is love?" And others are continually talking their shallow talk about God, as if He were a merely good-natured sort of Being who would make it all right for every one at the last. Now look at Christ. There you have something intelligible, final, effective; there you see the character of God translated into a language which you can understand, and which all men can understand. Have you doubts about whether God is love? Well, I cannot deny that that is the most difficult of the Church's doctrines, at least in certain phases of our experience. Only stand before Christ; put yourself there face to face with Him—at any point from the beginning of His mission till its end upon the Cross—and you cannot doubt what He will tell you. "No man knoweth the Father," He says, "but the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him"; and there can

be no mistake about that revelation. There the Divine character is translated into the kind of love that we can understand.

On the other hand, are we inclined to that sloppy and unreasonable estimate of God as the good-natured Being who will at the last resort let no one ultimately suffer, however wilful has been his sin and his refusal of the light? Plant yourself again before the face of Christ; how tremendous is His language! how stern He is towards wilful sin! how severe is His doctrine of God's irreversible judgement! how awfully He warns us of the engulfing hell! Now I say, what an incalculable blessing it is to have this final and soul-satisfying transcription of the Being of God in the words and character of Jesus Christ. It is no unknown God whom I worship. I know in whom I have believed.

Again, you see people all around you quite astray about the moral law. They are perplexed, for instance, with that most troublesome of human impulses, the sexual passion. Half the world appears to be determined to ignore that severe but most blessed law of sexual purity which our Lord emphasized so unmistakably. No teacher could have assured the world with more decisive authority than He of the duty

and the possibility of bringing the sexual passions under control, and of the sacramental sacredness and indissolubility of the marriage tie. What does the world need? It needs a final moral standard which shall be the standard for all humanity, and which comes to them with an authority which they are bound to believe is divine. Who can describe the progress the world could make, if it would accept Christ's standard of right and wrong?

There are so many points of view in which you can consider the finality of Christ. There is the sense of sin and its urgent cry for redemption. Plant yourself again before the face of Jesus and hear His words: "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." I am free, I can break with all the miserable past; and neither the multitude nor the magnitude of my sins is any obstacle to that fresh start of which He assures me, "Take up thy bed and walk." I can run the way of God's commandments because He hast set my soul at liberty. I am absolved, that is free! But who, except the Supreme, can assure mankind of this wonderful liberty which certainly is not the message of nature?

Or is there any spiritual aspiration which is not satisfied by the rich doctrine of illumina-

tion and grace which the books of the New Testament unfold to us? Surely it is final. So far from wanting anything more, we wonder whether the whole course of time can exhaust its possibilities.

And all this sense of finality, this satisfying faith, is possible only because we believe Jesus to be what the church was led to believe Him to be: that is really God in manhood. Otherwise, if He were a man only, howsoever close the fellowship with God into which He had been brought, there might always be another beyond. There are saints many; there are prophets many; one succeeds another and none is final: all are but partial or onesided. There may be always a fresh communication to be expected. If the unspeakable gift of assurance and finality is to be ours, that must be because we believe in Jesus Christ as something which cannot be surpassed, which can have no second: that is the Word made flesh.

Once again and for the last time, to believe in Jesus is the great surrender. "I know whom I have believed," said S. Paul, "and am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed to him against that day." S. Paul knew very well what the surrender meant; he knew how grim were the

difficulties, how tremendous was the sacrifice involved; but he knew that it was worth while, because the issue both of the individual life and of the whole life of humanity was to be the absolute sovereignty of Jesus and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Therefore it was worth while to bear all and to suffer all and to do all, because nothing done in the name of Christ would ever be unfruitful; however much it might seem to fail, even as the Master had seemed to fail, at the end it would prove to have been taken up into the everlasting treasure-house, and to stand as a stone built into the city of God, when Jesus should come in glory to judge the quick and dead. Here you come to what is called in modern language "eschatology": that is the doctrine about the end, about "the last things"; and here you come upon a difficulty about which I promised you last Sunday I would say something, because it is in a good many people's minds to-day.

They say, "Yes, Jesus taught a good deal about the end, but He was in fact deluded; what He taught was that the last day was going to come immediately; He was under a plain delusion in this respect, and if He was deluded in this respect why not in other respects? How can I put my faith in one who was so

deluded or believe Him to be God?" Well, I think they are right. I can indeed see that the Incarnation of our Lord must have involved limitation of knowledge; so He declares Himself. "Of that day and of that hour," He says, "knoweth no man, no, not the angels that are in heaven, neither the Son." He clearly says that there is no map of the future spread out before His human eyes. He proclaims the limitation of His human knowledge. Thus throughout His ministry He shows not the slightest signs of having anticipated the disclosures of modern science or modern criticism.

Limitation of knowledge, then—that I recognize in Jesus on His own authority; that I can understand to be necessary. I can understand that the Divine Person, coming into our human life under its conditions and its limitations, must have so accepted the limitation of knowledge; otherwise there could have been no true manhood, no real human faith and hope. But He was come for only one purpose, and that was to teach men about God and lead them to God. And if in His spiritual teaching —and He gave no other—there were mistake and delusion, that would seem to me to be incompatible with the idea of the Incarnation.

Thus people glibly say that He shared the delusions of His age as to the existence of evil spirits. Well, He certainly taught that there were evil spirits; He certainly looked out upon an evil world, and saw a rebel will at work there behind man's will—"an enemy hath done this." But I have yet to learn what is the superior wisdom which is to pronounce that estimate of things wrong, in spite of and in the face of the experiences of the greatest saints—down to Frederick Denison Maurice, who said he could not otherwise explain the facts. I see no reason to believe Jesus was deluded about the devils. I see no ground of right that men have to assume the sort of omniscience which should declare Him in that respect mistaken.

Coming now to the "eschatology" of Jesus, I want, if I can, to embrace a large subject in a few words, and to tell you what, after much study and pondering, I believe to be the truth. I would say first, read the prophets. Wherever they see some great world power, of a plainly godless sort, flaunting itself in the face of God, like the fierce Assyrian empire, or Babylon, or Edom, they pronounce its doom; God, they say, must judge that insolent power. And again and again in pronouncing these

oracles of God against Babylon, against Edom, against Assyria, they throw their clear prophecy upon the background of something vaster, dimmer, more nebulous—a great world catastrophe. So they speak of the sun and the moon ceasing to shine, and the stars falling from heaven, and the heavens being rolled up like a scroll—the very words which our Lord used later—which He borrowed and repeated.[1] What did they mean? They prophesied the judgements on each particular nation in the immediate future, and their particular prophecies were fulfilled. Those great lawless powers were doomed, and they fell. We read the history of those giant forms of empire on their way to ruin; and they are no more. But history went on and there was no catastrophe of the world as a whole.

Our Lord then follows the prophets. Solemnly, undisguisedly, unhesitatingly, He pronounced the doom, not now on some foreign power, but on Jerusalem which had rejected the Christ. I do not think it is possible to doubt that our Lord solemnly pronounced this speedy coming of the doom of God upon Jerusalem; and that prophecy was fulfilled in the year A.D. 70.

[1] See Isa. xiii. 10; xxiv. 23, etc.; and S. Mark xiii. 25, with parallel passages.

I think that all that our Lord said about the *immediate* coming of the judgement is in the manner of the Jewish prophets, and must be referred to that particular doom which He pronounced upon Jerusalem. This is the meaning of the words "this generation shall not pass away until all these things are fulfilled." What He is speaking of is the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple; that is the particular doom, the particular coming of the Lord in judgement which men are to see in their generation. But like the old prophets also He plants this judgement on the background of a vaster doom. History too, the whole of human history, this world's order, must have an end; and that is the day of God. The particular judgement on Jerusalem is only a prelude to something vaster. But did He tell them *when* that was to occur? No; I see on the whole convincing evidence of His *not* having done so. It is quite true that there is some confusion in the reports, and we have, I think, no ground for believing in such an inspiration of the Evangelists as would guarantee their verbal accuracy. It seems indeed quite inconsistent with the divergencies between their reports.

But taking the whole evidence you see *two*

currents in our Lord's teaching about the end. He is always teaching men to expect the coming of God in judgement, and to be ready for it; He is also teaching them to expect long periods of trial and the strain on faith, when they shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and shall not see it, and when faith shall almost fail. So it is He asks the awful question, "When the Son of Man cometh shall he find the faith on the earth?" Thus, I think, that when He used those words of ignorance and uncertainty—"Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only"—it was of the uncertainty of the last day that He spoke. And you remember that again He said to His disciples after His resurrection, when they asked Him a question about the great restoration of the kingdom to Israel, "It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father hath set in his own authority, but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you"—power to do your work here and now without knowing the future. That is it. Our Lord pronounced a certain doom upon Jerusalem to be shortly fulfilled. But

also, after the manner of the prophets, He threw it upon the background of the great final judgement; and that He left in the vagueness and mystery of uncertainty.

It is quite true that the disciples anticipated the immediate coming of the end of the world; they confused the ultimate with that which was to be its symbol and its foretaste. But Jerusalem fell; and they or their immediate successors did not see the coming of the end. No; they saw another vast power rising up to oppress and crush the church in the Roman Empire, and their faith suffered no shock; they went simply forward. All the old prophetic teaching, which Jesus had made His own, is repeated by John in his Apocalypse; only now not with regard to Jerusalem, which had already fallen, but to the Roman Empire turned persecutor; and again he pronounced the doom of God—now upon Rome, which in its turn fell. And again he throws that doom upon the background of the great final end.

This then is the sufficient summary of the whole matter. To believe in Jesus Christ means to believe that the end of every individual life, and of every institution—however rebellious, and however seemingly powerful—and the end of all human history, is to be

the indisputable and disclosed spectacle of the doom of God upon the insolence of men, and the sovereignty of Jesus, and the coming of His kingdom. But of the manner of the end, or its times and seasons, we are left in ignorance. We are taught only in figures—through a glass darkly.

Once again, then, here is the mark of *finality*. And here is both tremendous warning and the comfort of security. Here is tremendous warning if we are negligent of Him, like the sinners in Zion, about whom you heard in the Lesson which I read to you from Isaiah just now—"The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"[1]—the devouring fire and everlasting burnings of the divine presence. But on the other hand, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" In the despair that seizes upon the heart of a good man, when he sees goodness so weak and evil so strong within him and without him, this is what he needs—the assurance, the absolute assurance, that the end of all is the triumph of Jesus—of the true manhood, of the true Jerusalem. It is the coming of the King,

[1] Isa. xxxiii. 14.

now with all limitations removed, and all oppositions cast down to destruction—that is the end. And to believe that gives us constancy, hope, courage, endurance.

I would say to you, then, once more and for the last time, do not pretend to despise theological questions or dogmas as if they did not matter. Whether you believe Christ to be only a good man, or whether you believe Him to be the incarnate Son of God, makes the greatest possible difference to you personally and to the whole world. John was right; the deepest hopes of the world are bound up with this belief that Jesus is God. And I would urge you with all the seriousness which I can bring to bear, to get your souls face to face with this question. But no, I will not say with this *question*; I will say to get your souls face to face with that Person—that Figure in the Gospels, until the gift of sincere faith is given you and you can say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

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